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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 002742

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2017

TAGS: MOPS PTER PINS KPAL KWBG IS

SUBJECT: KASSAM ROCKET STRIKES IDF BASE; IDF LIKELY TO RETALIATE IN MEASURED MANNER

REF: TEL AVIV 2707

Classified By: Luis G. Moreno, Deputy Chief of Mission.

Reasons: 1.4 (b)(d).

¶1. (C) Israel Defense Force (IDF) sources confirmed to Embassy Tel Aviv's Defense Attaché early September 11 that a Kassam rocket launched from Beit Hanoun in the northern Gaza Strip struck an IDF training center located one kilometer north of the Gaza Strip in Zikim. According to the IDF's report at the time, the attack -- which occurred at 0150 in the morning -- injured between 50 and 60 IDF soldiers. Of those, four were critically injured, seven were moderately injured, and the rest lightly injured. The IDF source reported no change in the IDF's operational readiness or operational condition. According to Israeli media sources, the military arm of the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC) and Palestinian Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the rocket attack. Israeli media sources later in the day reported that the IDF responded with either an Israeli Air Force (IAF) airstrike or an artillery strike that wounded four Palestinians.

¶2. (C) COMMENT: Early morning press accounts had more than 66 soldiers injured. A light injury in this context can refer to undergoing shock that is normal from such a surprise attack. The number of soldiers reportedly "injured" from the rocket attack is unusually high for such a rocket, and begs the question as to what constitutes an injury in this case, or what kind of warhead the Kassam rocket carried.

¶3. (C) COMMENT, CONT.: The successful rocket attack on an IDF base on the eve of the Jewish High Holidays comes as a shock. Some Israeli politicians have already responded with harsh rhetoric. If the media reports of the IDF response cited above are accurate, this would be in keeping with the assessment reported reftel that -- barring any major, unprecedented attack -- the IDF will respond to successful Kassam rocket attacks with pinpoint air or artillery strikes, or small scale ground incursions against specific targets. Even in this case, Israel's political and military leaders remain reluctant to launch a larger ground operation into the Gaza Strip. An IDF officer with responsibility for civil affairs in the Gaza Strip told DCM and POLCOUNS this morning that a large-scale offensive was unlikely because it would "spoil the holiday season" and put Israel in a bad position before the September 23-24 AHLC international donor's conference in New York.

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JONES